

veil was rent, and in the clear light of eternity the natural order did appear sublime, with the way of the world and the ways of the earth discerned in rapt repose, as though at each nativity a glory shone around that hallowed both the unknown and the known. So mightily refreshed were some by glimpse of grace transcendent, for them made immanent, that they arose restored and ministered henceforth to those who'd borne with their extremity, upraised at last beyond their own and other's need. Not so, alas, did fair Ranghena, but straightway passed in her unfinished youth. Yet gazing from an ever widening moat of mystery, she saw within the world a kindness quickening into power and might that ever should shelter and anoint her new-born son, succor and exalt the priceless babe, and in such vivid certainty did she depart in peace.

Strange the parting was to Ragna then, untrained in sorrow's ministry, unschooled in mortal surgery! A mother, in a sort of rhapsody, to leave her child alone within that very tower of life that she had found so dark! Apprised of some vast brooding tenderness in magnitude beyond her own, she breathed a prayer of praise and went her way consoled. For Ragna, time had never come when she could calmly contemplate the world complete without her care and ministration, and think to venture on some solitary path beyond her life's allotted toil, toward effortless finality.

Was this the next exactation she must face, the new demand that she must meet? So to dispose the ordering of her affairs at court that she might not be missed should she depart? The wheels revolve as roundly still, all things run on in their accustomed grooves, and thus her absence ne'er be felt? She gasped at the suddenness of the interrogation and felt a-quaking at the monstrous undertaking. Whence came the query, couched in her own words, that left her voiceless with suspended breathing? While Ragna grasped the nature of the sharp imperative, the

shouldering of its burden must be postponed for some much later, lower level of endeavor, with leisure for sublime resolve. The sense of herself as still young, persistent in all spinsters, postponed until this very hour for Ragna all premonition of retirement from the field of action. Aware as though by chance, apprised by circumstance of her will and skill for survival, she realized in retrospect no single lapse of enterprise had given pause for pondering her own demise. Nor could she contemplate it now, she had no instinct for cessation or extinction. Time no doubt would be vouchsafed, in that the warning had sounded so clearly.

But in that later day of Evelaine, no warning in the wind, no sign in the heaven presaged the sudden, piteous doom, the canceled grace, the broken unrehearsed farewell. Too late, too late for any ministration, unction or confession. How was it then for the gode with her gone? All wondered, yet all knew the wonder that had come to pass. He held his peace, nor mourned her loss abroad. He scorned to linger on as one alone, bereft, undone, but henceforth lived as two, excelling in his deep-felt dual role, father and mother to his helpless bairn, as one heart-whole. So much for him and the wonder of his ways - so much indeed

What was there that Evelaine of Erne Eyrie had so greatly feared, she might not draw the breath of life beyond the bearing of her tender babe? In Iceland then did peace abound, nor was there care or shelter lacking! But darkness of the winter feast did wrap her round, and darkness ever was the cloak of fear. Ranghena's season was the same, in gloom her fatal travail came. Ah, hapless torches smoldering in the cruel wind till quenched and still in winding shrouds of snow! But now was Baldur's feast of light when every living, breathing thing within its reach of cleansing cheer bloomed fair and innocent of fear. Propitious omen of felicity for Svanhild's own deliverance near!

Thus flowed the subterranean stream of Ragna's thought, sometimes

in clear, swift running words, all others eddying round some sudden, inner image, or caught and held by some all-silencing impression along the steeply rising path, only to leap forward again, headlong and inarticulate, stimulated by the effort of the climb. Erect and strong she mounted skyward, leaning only when she tarried upon her gnarled staff. Where the path was steepest, the climbing took such toll of her breath that her mind was drained of words and imagery for many steps. Where thought ran deepest, her thinking took such toll of her strength that she must needs stand stock still until some rampant dissonance dissolved. With intervals thus sharply broken, sustained exploratory thinking was physically impossible, and must of sheer necessity await the full ascent, with climbing over.

How strange that Svanhild, or for that matter, any in full health and in the hey-day of youthful strength should choose withdrawal from the teeming tide of life's bright promises and changeful scene! Strange also but more natural were the visions of the blind and the songs of the deaf, unaffected as they were by present influences and redolent of some rarefied realm, exempt from pressure of immediate circumstance! The old skald was an instance. His cantos fuller and richer every year, he himself alone in all the court was unaffected by the alien note the foreign child had brought, for of them all he heard but nought, and thus at last they knew that he was deaf, however perfectly he simulated hearing.

Then there were those of such transparent lives and character that one might feel their coming in advance and sense their visitation when as yet they were far off; beings on earth who yet, like the angel of the Annunciation, foretold their advent, and thus might all make ready, nor any be taken off guard. The visits of the bishop, for example, had always been foreknown, announced before each voyage by none other than

himself. From the time of Krystjan's christening to his coronation, Ghenalt was always his own messenger.

So they had made him a bishop, and all these many years he shepherded fresh flocks upon the islands of the sheep. Well, so had he done at home before he ever gained his glittering crook from Rome. He began as a shepherd, for so she knew him first, so different from the other lads with tender care for careless, carefree youths that minded not his clemency, his trustful strength unfurled, to shield the widowed and the fatherless, and even in those early years a mind to bind the broken-hearted. He had ever a sense of the soul and its wholeness, a feeling for salvation, an instinct for innocence in any guise. Nor could he tolerate that any living thing go maimed upon its earthly pilgrimage. Pure religion and undefiled were meet and right to practice, when men have crossed the great divide of years, but not alas for lads, untried and unordained! Foredoomed, unnatural like the forced fruition of an early damaged tree! A piteous cross to bear in lusty youth!

This was what came of setting boys at women's work, at tending timid flocks, guiding faltering steps, fostering trustful growth and nurturing of helplessness. Merciful, innocent, selfless work, from which in time their manhood suffered sad reversal of ideals and purposes. As watchdogs might no more be trained to hunt, nor trusted in the tumult of the chase, so shepherds henceforth were undone for bearing arms on land or sea. Reject of army and of navy, what was there for them but the church and its allotted ministry, and in the end the bishop's ring and book, the shepherd's crook at last in place of spear or lance?

Not that her Ghenalt had lacked fortitude, for he was ever dauntless, venturesome beyond the rest, enticed by danger, lured by any quest that promised peril. The first recruit in any rescue band to hazard dizzy mountain heights through frozen pass or deep crevasse, he

welcomed any grim ordeal to reach the helpless and the lost, while most he pined to sail in the glory of the following gale, for any purpose or for none. Yet however much he reveled in the violence of the elements, such as train in human salvage soon despise and disavow the deadly aim of war. Servers, conservers, preservers of life's fond, unstable breath, their strength is impotent for deeds of doom and violence, for dealing death to human kind.

Here was the place of timelessness at last, with balm for all the years and grace abundant for the heart's arrears, unchanged as ever, now that the climb was passed. How vast a sanctuary for the soul's retreat! On the farthest rim of the world a frosty ring of never melting snow embraced the wide-spread panorama of green hills and blue waters in a shining bond of peace. Here on the heights was space for peace, time for rest, room for hope's wide spread of wings. Ragna drew her ample habit close about her and sank down upon the rude, unyielding rest of weathered stone, consigned her mind to deep, untimed repose.

Old myths for new, new myths for old, the landscape looked the same. Thus ran the musings of her many summers into one.

How high was heaven's arch above the breathing verdure of the hills! How round its reach, with hovering clouds along the broken sky-line!

The fact was unexplainable that after all the crowding years since fair Ranghena passed, her vanished presence seemed more real today than any new arrival at the court. For she was good and wise, and in her eyes her thoughts would rise to view, so you might know her will and understand by foresight what she would have you do. Not so with Svanhild's enigmatic glance, like sombre flashing jewels, yet with a listening prescience darkly bright, too striking in her gentle, noble face.

There could be no doubt, Svanhild was wise in her generation and her wisdom was benign, not the bitter aftermath of foolish virgins, nor the

brazen wit of wanton wives. She had been born a woman, not a temptress, and from the first, content with nature's burgeoning joys, incurious of sorrow. A queenly woman child, the legend ran, and as queen consort she was womanly, as some queen consorts in the war-torn world had sadly, madly failed to be! Abandoned wenchess that were held in scorn among camp followers of low degree! There were always sycophants and scandal-mongers, male carriers of continental gossip who, one way or another, contrived to make known both near and far the calumnies of their own untempered circles. There were two names in quick succession reviled beyond all others, one a queen of France and one a queen of England, high as that, near as that, and only recently! Or were they but the same wild jade, a chess queen moved from square to square by the losing player in despair, so closely did the tales agree, the rueful records tally.

Ragna, by an effort of the will, dismissed the world-old quandary and turned the wheel of reverie to fresh comparison of queens. Ranghena was incomparable. Was Svanhild not incomparable as well? If but the twain were more alike! The only similarity their second sight, a danger potent in itself, for there was witchcraft in the North and magic, black as well as white! The dread nocturnal gloom that lasted on so long did amply cover mad indulgences and freely foster wild unearthly notions, eerie charms and sorry potions for Christian souls' undoing, when even trusty, steady folk went chasing mare's tails on the moor, returning to their kith and kin as strangers. But that was far away, today was time for all good folk whose wits were crazed by specters of the night, or who had languished on too long alone in the dark, to ease them of their sore complaint and rid them of their ailing.

If for the length of one long slow breath the climber slept, the respite could have been but momentary, for here on the height the business of breathing was brisk, whipping up the blood, spurring on the wits

to keener wakefulness, nor did she lose her still unwinding thread of thinking.

How young were she and Ghenalt when they waited here upon the height throughout the day's long-lingered light, before the shadows of the night dispelled the waking dream and darkness reigned; ah festive day when home he came, a full-frocked priest of Rome, to christen Krystjan, and they stood together at the altar with the godchild held between them.

How easy, once they twain had stood sponsors for the royal child, so striking was the likeness, to imagine him their very own through nature's guileless conjuring. But Ragna did not try to imagine. She tried not to imagine. Godchild, God's son could scarcely be improved upon; the terms were good enough indeed for common or for gala use.

And now in but a little while he shculd arrive once more, for the baptism of another, later heir, and they would stand together as before, as sponsors for the royal child, godparents or grandparents in time's accounting.

VIII

Vacationing for Anatole was new, unknown till now, but not unearned. For his brief years, while shadowed by the specter of disaster, were crowded with good earnest of a high resolve, and he was serious in his devoir. Serious in all things; even when he was laughed at, as indeed he often was, his dignity did not desert him. He never would turn coward in jest to cover his chagrin, nor act the clown to hide his hurt as did the children here, and for that matter, their elders as well. Upon the instant he perceived the perils of his own pursuit did he desist therein and straightway revise his ways, loath to waste his strength in useless friction.

While so young as to be, for the most part, at the mercy of his kindly guardians, he was nevertheless the product of three powerful influences, and being thrifty at heart, he held fast to the worldly and unworldly wisdom bequeathed by these his prayerful preceptors. Roxanne Francoise, by force of fond persuasion and conviction, taught conformity without subservience, and arbitration of all schisms and divergences, wherefore he was adept at adaptation to the ways of those around him, yet without the risk of their adoption. She counseled him that he reserve all judgment of his fellows and conscientiously refrain from final fixed opinions, and count in every impulse of his own, before he followed it, the cost to all concerned. Should diplomacy evoke his obvious genius, one could not begin too early, and all in all, what worthier career when fate of church and state hung by a thread? For she was his mother, and asked only that her son survive. Mothers have no need to be told that life is first, the greatest of all gifts, to be defended even against Jehovah, for it was written in the original primer of nature's mother-wit long before the earliest gathered sheaves of prophets and sages, and

beats in the heart, rings in the ears, and dances before the eyes of all who have born their young.

Frere Franchot taught by word and deed the gentle art of foresight, of taking all steps first in the mind, that one be not caught in the witness act and shamed before the world, void of plan or purpose. So might one's very conduct come to share the grace of music faithfully rehearsed, faultlessly performed. Thus in time should effort become ease, and youth be freed at last of the self-defeating tendency to sue for help when what's to do can only be essayed alone. For he was his tutor, and asked only that his charge achieve. A teacher by nature, he would fain prepare a pupil to surpass himself by far.

The shepherd of the island flock did preach and practice constant exercise of pure and unalloyed compassion, prescribing that the ardent child should learn to wrap the whole wide living world in chaste beatitude of mind, whose full forgiveness when the need should come would then include himself. For he was the child's confessor, and he offered him a cross - even the true cross - on which to save his soul alive.

He had a passion for communication in all its phases. Throughout the uninflected clearness of the summer holiday, unmarked by time or change, or the interruptions of his thoughts by Helma and Selma, he had worked upon the log of his life. However dreamlike the passing scene, Anatole had employed his idle hours in thought transference, transcribing with calm deliberation his impressions on sheaves of curling parchment.

He began to keep a diary to compile the curious data of his own discerning, and when the journey ended, certain careful, long-considered packets of words wended their way over the Northern Sea. To his tutor he wrote of Svanhild:

"Her tales are told to escape from herself and her scene, and live

in many another character, time and place, and there is also another difference in the style of her recounting. Instead of giving reality to that which exists only in the imagination, rather does she lend to fact the luster of fancy, and give to truth-the glamor of fiction."

To his mother he wrote of Krystjan:

"So startling and compelling is his countenance that no one can deny refuse, or oppose him. He has an up-to-the-moment look and manner, as though all he had ever been, he is now, and his every thought, word and deed gather momentum as of notes struck in perfect pitch and ~~six~~ sequence squarely on the beat. So great is his fearlessness that he can face even joy without flinching."

To the bishop he wrote of Ragna:

"She whom you call the king-maker, the mother superior of our Court, I too must venerate. For her own sway rests on the certainty that nature is good and goodness natural. She believes the right of kingship is divine, determined without question by heredity, and that Krystjan towering over his fellows is merely lifted by virtue of his own nature, even as the corn above the grass. This is her religion, in that it offers a life-long consecration for her tireless energy."

From the beginning Anatole/loved to fondle words for themselves, for their wonderful shape and sound, their intricate use^{had} of the breath, and their individual rhythm, then in combinations as though they were some kind of blocks to play with, to arrange in patterns on the ground like mosaics, or erect in columns, spires and arches that you could knock down again with a feather. In later years he put too great faith in their power and meaning, until from oft repeated disappointment he finally put too little, but he never lost his love for their sound.

At the time he sang beautifully in a breathless treble, light and staccato, but true and emphatic as though he spaced each note to give it

unique importance, never carried along, as were all who sang in this strange tongue, by the swing of the tune and the momentum of camerderie. Nor could he sing their songs, for the color and richness of their voices were such as to need no accompaniment.- The native voice was everything in itself, vibrant and far-carrying, even the words did not count for much compared with the resonance, lilt and cadence.

Once he heard a lad singing down on the shore, and the sound rang like a deep-toned bell far and wide over wind and waves. Once he heard a girl singing upon the hills, and the sound floated over the valley, echoing from crag to crag. He thought she must blow upon a goat's horn or perhaps upon a lur, while someone else answered upon its mate, yet it was but the natural voice of one lone lass calling home the herd. Then on Midsummer Night's Eve, with fires blazing on all the seven hills through the vigil of the light, through the clear white night an old skald had sung one long saga, his voice rising like a spiral of flame in each verse, while the refrain that gathered at first faint and far off, came riding up at last in waves that crashed and roared and drowned his fiery tones.

Indeed, the voices truly were as the stature of the people had first seemed to him, works of art larger than life, but still overshadowed by nature in its wildness and grandeur. He retained his own style of music and his willing dependence on instrumental accompaniment.

He had been one of the many boy sopranos in the palace choir at home and afterwards he was solitary acolyte for the bishop of the Faeroes, so that singing alone by note or by rote was hardly new in his experience, but words so enticed him, he found it impossible to slight even the smallest syllable or slur a single interval. He rendered each phrase therefore with the precision that foreigners use in speaking a language far more accurately than do natives.

Knightly and courtly by heredity; his gallic chivalry took rise in natural sympathy, wherefor his first concern had been for the other allies

in this unknown land. The fervor of his sentiment had then been clear and fair to see and all the court was touched thereby, which same himself remembered now with gathering intensity. Here was Svanhild queen by right of marriage to Krystjan, her rightful lord and lover, who was surely king in his own right, powerful to have and hold her. Massive were the battlements that sheltered them, wherein he also dwelt by courtesy, a helpless charge upon the care and kindness of the king, and yet he felt himself to be her shield and safeguard as well as the sole surviving link with childhood's distant bourne, a keepsake or reminder from her home slight and wistful as a fragile wisp of heartsease cherished in a book of prayer.

To be sure, she was not of royal birth. Hers was a rarer, earlier dowry than worldly dynasties disburse, nor was her glory only of the earth. Her father the gode had accomplished a great and goodly thing in the North. The Truce of God, which by pontifical decree had blest the South, endured at best but from Wednesday till Monday in surcease from war and feudal strife, while over Iceland, through this mighty man of peace, for forty years the white flag floated stainless as the arctic snow. Such indeed had been the pious hope and prayer of Godfrey, soldier of the cross, the chosen king of old Jerusalem, when he too grasped the sceptre but refused the crown. Some tenet in the faith of both forbade the regal title and acclaim.

Now Anatole was deeply versed in the lore of his hero Godfrey de Bouillon, whose chivalry and gallantry, chastity and fire had made him the sainted patron and immortal pattern of all high-born lads. Indeed, how could a conquering knight lift his head surmounted by a crown of gold in that place of pain where his lord had lain wearing a mocking crown of thorns! But no such precedent accounted for the modern conduct of this great disinterested ruler. He certainly did not aspire to be buried on the mount of Calvary, nor had he reverence for Christian burial at any

time or place. Yet, about his high indifference and calm restraint a legend ~~legend~~ was unmistakably growing. The child himself was old enough to read the signs and could not doubt that Krystjan had grounds for his heartfelt hero worship. - But the code of the gode he did not understand.

IX

Late in the evening of the day that Ragna returned, the queen sat upon the steps at her bedside. She loosened the band of her close-bound hair, then swaying softly, comb in hand, began the sweeping downward strokes that pressed the mass throughout its length and breadth until it floated freely like a burnished cloud over the dimming whiteness of her gown. She pondered the words of a song sung by Anatole when first he came to court, and wondered what meaning the child derived therefrom:

The heart of life
Belies the shelt'ring shrine,
Though quick'ning vine
Doth soft entwine
Its nest.

The rose of dreams
Upon the blossoming thorn,
In faith upborne,
By barbs of scorn
Sore pressed.

Till sacred heart
And sentient, sanguine rose
Their light transpose
And sight disclose
Their quest.

Stillness filled the room, the halls without and the sea below. "A night of calm," she thought aloud, when suddenly along the passage

floor, as though in answer to her words, a cautious stride approached her door, a cautious knocking and a low voice called, "Svanhild, I'm home," then through the open door, "I've come alone, but not for long, I must rejoin my men. The birchlegs gather from the North, they are my strength and may not be ignored; a day at most to watch them in their stirring pride, and I'll return and here abide, please God." As he spoke, he stooped and gathered from the steps, where it lay spread, a soft voluminous cloak of twilight hue, seamless and semicircular in shape. "Come as you are and watch with me the lighting of the signal fires along the skyline of the hills, by which I gauge the pace of their approach and time my stay." Swept by the tide of his volition, uplifted by the chaste incentive of his face, she complied without reluctance as he led.

From level to level, over ramp and causeway, they came at last to the topmost rampart of the fortress, where he lifted her upon the battlement above him. With one hand weighting hers where it held the ledge, the other thrown across her knee, he leaned against the rugged curve of the belvidere and followed with his gaze the nearing chain of fires upon the hills, then southward searched the open sea for sight of sails.

"You seek a ship now hither bound?"

"There are always ships upon the sea so fine a night as this, and

in so great a calm those nearest should be rowed to port. I saw three shadows cast upon the sea by clouds almost invisible before the setting sun, but sharply drawn in streaks of black upon the undulating tide, like serpents riding on the golden waves. A furtive warning, darkly ominous as a flag of doom, unfurled in fear by forces of the middle world. But now all's clear as glass, a night to last a lifetime in the heart's true covenant."

"Krystjan, you should have seen the wonder in the face of Anatole on Midsummer's Eve, but then, he'll tell you in his own precocious way. So much for one small lad to grasp and hold, yet sure I am he will retain it all."

"'Twas at this very time in my own youth I first took ship upon a voyage that I never more forgot. For all my life from then till now was set in its course by the findings of that voyage. But I at his age was a lad well grown, as stalwart as I was athirst for chance and change and unforeseen event, and there was nothing others did I could not try. But he's so small, so light and slight, and then withal so self-contained. For Ragna says, and closely does she watch, among the fine array of garments that he brought from home, not one is yet outgrown, each fits as when he came. When will he grow?"

"When all things are familiar, he will grow, and not before; his adaptation is not yet complete, too much of his vitality still goes into the effort, but he perseveres, is very brave, and now it won't be long. When a sapling is transplanted, it must be given time to find the sustenance it needs in the new soil, nor should it be allowed to bloom or bear while all its strength is needed at the root. Ragna soon will see and be, no doubt, in a quandary to alter the deft habiliments for his increased capacity. But now as you began, tell me, Krystjan, of yourself on that first fair northern expedition."

"For me to tell it over," said the king, "will scarce recover any-

thing as then it was or seemed to me, and yet, the posture of events is much the same, since I, as well as Anatole, was sent to school upon the Island of the Sheep for my novitiate; and that same master of our fate, kind shepherd of the lambs, on seeing me beside the trained and lettered youths so many years my senior, advised postponement and diversion of some lusty sort; upon some unknown shore where I might learn, ungoaded and unquestioning, from sights and sounds and happenings and gather lore of life first hand. 'Twas Ragna's choice, your father's court, famed for its concord and enlightenment and wonders of its natural environs; so it was I went to Iceland, and all was wonderful as any tongue could tell.

"Your father the gode enlisted me in a band now famous for power and influence, called The Sons of the Sons. All they did I too might try, and even more, for in the night when others took their rest, he himself, the gode, and I would clamber up a narrow ledge, which slanting to the right, then left, then right again, sheer against the cliff, arrived by zigzag at the top, where rose a tower with overarching walls, which at their apex opened to the sky. In those days hanging moss and creepers veiled the cliff, and in the hey-day of the sun star-drops sprang from every niche and crevice, which miracle of sudden bloom perhaps you never saw, for now a heavier bulk of stone surrounds a sturdier winding stair. But then as now the watchtower stood upon the massive shoulder of the cliff, to which the jutting ledge gave access. There, below the central opening of the dome I knelt to gaze with eager eyes upon the riddle of the distant skies, inverted there with depths that yawned as far below as overhead their zenith soared, reflected in a pure transparent orb of crystal, long embedded in the native rock. Here would we watch the moon and stars and planets wheel and shift, rise and set through the magic hours of night. How fortunate a lad was I!"

"You know that now."

"I thought so then. Forsooth, he taught me all that/could rightly

learn /and much that I could only comprehend in later years. With all his chart and diagrams unheard of anywhere on earth, methought, and then the maps! His glorious maps, so clear and sure within a certain range, conjectural without, like islands fair and ascertained, ringed round with unsolved mystery. While on the far horizon's rim, at the vanishing point of human ken, where upon all other maps fantastic denizens of space, leviathans, sea serpents and monsters of the deep form fearsome decoration, appeared only the oft repeated words, 'As yet unknown.' He taught me a lasting contempt for that lowborn trick of fancy that rushes into the gap with invented terrors, where just the emptiness and tardiness of certainty were bane enough. And far afield in time as well as space those bright inverted heavens led me, but not beyond the era set for the North Star as the Pole Star of our earth, but believe me, at the time I thought it long enough, and dizzy would I be with far distended thought when from the night's adventuring I dropped to dreamless sleep."

"Strange anodyne for a lonely lad of royal line, an orphaned prince-ling far from home."

"Perhaps. But in the m&erning freshness of my life an apparition shone, so darkly bright, scarce tempered to my boyish sight, daughter of him who had been great gode, wife of him who was then and still is great gode of all Iceland. Many have tried and failed to describe; I vow I should not now attempt it, but this much you yourself must know. Within the scope of her brief life she moved and breathed in a world of exalted sympathy, unaware of her own destiny. Many the songs that were sung by the Sons, extolling her semblance to capture her favor. Though fitting the rounds they might raise in her praise, she was won in her own time, not by the voices but by the words, for Erne, who never sang, had written the words in the silence of his long night watches.

"And there she was in all the splendor of the Northern Lights, a

magnet so great to my boy's heart that never, never did I want to return to the Island of the Sheep, and dreadful was the leaving. The sense of parting darkened the doorway of every new day until her death, when the pain was stilled and the rent in the heart was healed."

Svanhild's thought stood still until he spoke again.

"How strange it is that you should not recall her face; that I alone still cherish it, not only as an inner clemency, but often in the landscape wild, when long alone, or in the open heart of the fire whereon our guests gaze blindly, I glimpse her suddenly, far from the native scenes that held her then."

"Many at home recall her today. How fortunate for me, Krystjan, in this your land that never knew her presence, you should claim the memory for us both! Since childhood, in a dreamless place behind the veil of imagery, a breathless voice I know to be my own reiterates the phrase, 'When shall I see her face to face and she herself return my gaze?' However keen my listening, I hear but my own questioning, in faint but endless echoing."

Krystjan was slow in finding his way among his thoughts, and slower still with utterance. When he spoke, his tone had lowered, "May it not be, Svanhild, that life reserves its answer until questioning is past, and even now a silent answer waits on silent hearkening? For unknown vistas throw a light within some darkened recess of the mind and waken long forgotten quandary."

"Dim and dull down under the sea my crystal flashes no prophecy."

Nothing loath to leave unsolved the theories in question, Krystjan ventured on more proven ground. "As the bride of Erne-Aery was to me, so are you to Anatole; an ideal vouchsafed before the heart had conjured it, a strangeness that he cannot grasp and yet cannot resist."

"Krystjan, I would not disquiet the child, yet but for me his home-

sickness had gone too deep."

"How well I know! One thing is certain, Svanhild, his heart now hangs upon your slightest whim."

"He has been taught to gauge all thought and action by the rules of harmony and tempo. He says that to the true poet, all of life not only should scan, but does."

"Most diligent he is in the scanning and construing of his lengthening quota of Latin lines. If his later life reflects the logic with which his present duties are performed, his mother may be proud indeed."

Here he fell into a silence and a sadness, which Svanhild did, with watchfulness endure. Finally she made bold to murmur, "She is better now, his mother, there alone, serene and confident about his life and growth, and the separation does not wear upon her cruelly, as at first. I wrote a letter to her, Krystjan, when you were away, about her son's propensity and gifts of virtuosity. I said, if you would know, that never is the lad alone, but constantly companioned by themes of poetry and melody, which entering the very streams of his existence compel the conversation of his outer life. For he maintains that music is the perfect gauge and rule for human life's progression, a patterned flow of sound where each nuance fulfills a certain modulation, with sequence in and of itself the only consequence. Above all other arts, music has found grace with life and wooed the bird of passage known as Time, and takes no harm from the heavy beat of its tireless wings. Musicians in all tongues and climes have come to terms with time in its flight, and Anatole is even one of these. Such was my epistle's fond intent, which same, as yet though sealed was never sent, for when the labored script was done, the pity of its purpose was resolved, the sense that irked me of her lorn estate, he languishing alone was spirited away, nor was there aught for me to say she did not know. The absence of her son no longer weighs upon her hear so in her soul she feels that he is safe. Having paid all for this hear'

ease, she feels herself requited and basks in answered prayer."

At these sibylline words, Krystjan sighed a mighty sigh of relief and laid his forehead on her hand, in rest so long enduring that she wondered had he sunk to sleep, as she had sometimes seen her father on the ledge of his lookout after his long night's watch.

A wind came up from the shore below with a rushing sound, lifting her hair so that it swept upward like a dark plume of smoke above them, and Krystjan, roused, spoke aloud, straining his vision in the thickening gloom, "You look like a mermaid with hair floating upward."

"So I am, taking my ease on the floor of the sea, with my crystal swaying on my knee. 'Tis dark and cold but lighter to hold than ever it was at Erne-Aery."

"Is it there in the depths you conjure up the face of her you've never seen?"

"Without the aid of any ministrant save sight I see the mother in the child, in Anatole himself."

"And so do I this very moment, in the whirling darkness of your lifted hair above me there so high, hiding the distant pallid sky, I see your mother Evelaine, even as the dark beauty of a valkyrie. But Anatole imbued with the ideal of the Holy Mother, is repelled by our pagan inheritance. He says that on the Island of the Sheep, among the shepherds on the rocks, he learned something for himself, to wit that in those precincts where no woman may abide to minister to men, a compensating tenderness comes forth, some dormant instinct in the men themselves to tend, console and bless all youthful helplessness, assuage distress and comfort fright, and strange it is that he should be so right. What he finds a stumbling block is the inordinate exaltation of heroic male achievement. He is appalled at a religion that has no place for tender mothers and helpless babes, selflessness and humble faith, with final laurels only for the ruthless clan that live by the sword and die by the

sword, who to a man must perish fearlessly in strife! With but such doubtful honor and acclaim as fall to women ministrants of war! He takes no pleasure in the sight of damsels on their coal black chargers, riding through the midnight skies arrayed in man's heroic guise. He distrusts the casting of girls in the roles of warrior maidens."

Svanhild smiled an enigmatic smile, and absent was her brooding gaze remote the voice in which she spoke. "'Tis not so far ahead in time, a single century or so, perhaps, when Christian France in her extremity shall raise from her own soil a flashing warrior maid, the savior of her soul, and make a record for all time. A solitary shepherdess, a virgin at her vigil in the fields. Behold the tender maid, a slender listening lass, shall hear the clarion call to arms, heraldic summons only heroes answer, to rise from piteous, anguished loss and mount victorious to the skies! As though the present were withdrawn, a window opens in a frame of flame, and through the same behold a youthful knight in armor white upon a coal black charger, and with no weapon but her emblem leads a vanquished cause to triumph, then like Brunhild vanishes in fire, earth's cleansing fire, to ride immortal in the firmament of fame."

"If I believe this thing shall come to pass, it is because you see it so and I question not your seeing."

"Ah, brave believer of intrinsic truth that waits not on belated proof thereof, but runs to meet its first prophetic beam. The unction, Krystjan, lies in your belief, with faith itself the rarest miracle on earth."

"Forsooth I've found, while faring up and down the world, that faith of mortals waits on man's extremity. Of true believers there are few, and they are born, not made. For each strange tongue proclaims a strange creed, ignored in times of opulence and ease, revered in dire calamity and need."

"You speak with fervor, Krystjan, with heartfelt resonance as though some sharp experience gave substance to your utterance! For you as well some vivid sequence of events now passes in review, save that for you the window cut in time gives on the past. Recount as you recall the circumstance; acquaint me with its influence."

And nothing loath the king began. "Once hard pressed and spent with conflict I sank upon the groaning ground, thereon to languish under blinding pain and deafening sound, wherefrom the saracen did rescue me. He wrapped me 'round in his own flowing robe, then bound me on a milk-white steed that bore me to a secret place of peace. An oasis remote indeed from clangor and the stench of death! A fertile bower of humid growth where such as I might yet recapture breath, whose very verdure from far off straight past the eye despatched its own essential balm. Then ran an icy chill through all my fevered frame, and cool and still my throbbing throat became. Be calmed at heart and robbed of all desire to die, I came to lie beneath the safety of the sand itself. 'Tis like the memory of a dream, the refuge of that subterranean room, whose vault was carved in airy arches and faintly lit with phantom torches that shimmered in its gloom.

"Therein abode a solitary sage of tranquil soul and saintly mien, who suffered me and succored me for many moons. Basking in the circle of his silences, bathing my spirit in the healing spring of his unfailing clemency I lingered long, ever more alive to the wordless tenor of his thought.

"My rescuer by stealth at night would ~~issue~~^{venture forth} to join the sorties of the fray, sometimes besieging, oftentimes besieged, but evermore returned from conflict, ~~xxxxxx~~ to hide his telltale scimitar deep in the cleansing sand, and sit in humble fervor at his mentor's feet, till all his being was immersed in healing depths of quietude. Then he and I would fall to boasting, both in knightly fashion. In pride of race and

creed we were an even match, each fully armed in his conceit. For he, the Saracen, discoursed on Islam, Allah and Sala'adin, myself on Christendom, Jehovah and Sigurd Jorsalfar, and both on what we held most worshipful; harping on peace, carping on war, until the sage would silence our haranguing tongues with softly spoken charms and deft serene surmise on sun and moon and stars and their celestial influence on this terrestrial sphere, to catch us in his net of far distended thought.

"At length, as from these ministrations I did mend, upon the green and fragrant border of the well, there to beguile the hours, we held a tournament of wits that challenged each man's inner faith and hidden hope the secret standard that had given us, two soldiers and a hermit, our several separate callings. For one was knight of the Holy Cross, one a knight of the Star and Crescent, and one a sworn recluse, a voluntary, solitary refugee from human help and sympathy, there in the burning deserts. We knights had still our driving purpose in the world, and thirst for life's encounters. For me, at home were ties of blood and duty, and in the monastery my brothers in the fellowship of faith and ritual, and even on the field of battle, the army's verve with strength united for a common cause. Naught of this remained for him, our host, for he'd renounced alike possession, care and rank, and all companionship, to seek alone upon the pathway, winding inward, the soul's supreme felicity. Yet of us three, now oddly only he from pangs of loneliness was wholly free.

"The bout was cruel and without quarter, waged with stern intent, to find behind all babel and confusion of tongue that Word which was in the beginning, before all other words. Each scorned the other's true belief as vain surmise, his vital faith as myth or superstition from out the fabled past, until by keen comparison, ever closer to the mark, and long forbearance with each other's claim, we finally came to such sharp clarity of view we straightway knew that each beheld the selfsame light, and blinded could not tell aright the glory of his wondrous sight,"

"So this is what the crusades taught you! But Anatole will not need to fare so far to find the secret of his inner faith."

Bending above him, the queen framed his temples in her curving hands and looked long into his upturned face. "Krystjan," she said, "some power inexorable decrees that you shall hold your course. The most unpracticed in the art of divination can read that all unaided. 'Tis written in your face."

"And what shall Anatole's protection be?"

"The past shall guard and nourish him and never let him go."

"And his development, his destiny? Shall he maintain his privilege of privacy and come to his majority?"

"The answer is not as simple as with you. In a sense, maturity in him waits not upon futurity, but rather by unnoticed steps, subtle nuance and counterpoint, in modesty and privacy, looking backward more than forward, he shall in time attain a much belated youth."

"A forecast I would fain accept and prayerfully hold as truth! No scene escapes him that has once transpired, and avidly he seizes on the burden of our native songs."

"Song in its volatile desire is nearest to the tongues that speak the living language of the heart. Krystjan, I also, even as Anatole, recoil from things unnatural and do distrust certain fanaticisms in the creed of Rome, not only the piteous sadness inherent in the Christian faith, presented in each anguished crucifix, but the voluntary resignation of earth's bright beneficence, an isolation from the flowing tide of life, a stepping aside from nature's purposes and processes as in contempt of that mysterious welding, by which she carries on the race."

"Svanhild, the most archaic types of worship have exalted celibacy, vestal virgins chosen for the many altars on the isles of Hellas, and maidens consecrated to the temple of Jehovah in Jorsal."

"Ah yes, but since the coming of the Church, legions upon legions of unnumbered nuns, now living out their calling in a trance of abnegation! I do abhor the ghastly waste of youth and zest and comeliness, growth and the churlish denial of strength and natural self-perpetuating grace in the land of the living, in lieu of vain unprofitable postponement."

Her words seemed to penetrate a vein of complexity in Krystjan's mind, so deep he held his peace, but Svanhild's words strode on. "In no system of religion is virginity so eulogized as in this latest doctrine of the Cross and Crown. For virgin ministrants of altar fires who pour libations forth with measured chant and postured grace, virgin visitors of Valhalla upon their armored steeds, and virgin postulants that take the veil of mercy toward all helplessness, offend against the natural laws but slightly compared with virgin mothers, martyred sore on earth, then crowned beyond the stars, created by those Eastern faiths that choose ironically enough, a human saviour. By what inhuman reckoning must these true sons be fatherless, disclaim paternity in the natural scheme to insure divine inheritance? If I revere the man-god of the Christian creed, beyond the myths of our own dark and superstitious North, it is because with my first breath I called one father, in whom such loftiness of mind abode and gentleness of heart endured, that I am able to believe in all the good the Savior's followers ascribe to him, and call him Lord indeed."

Though fraught with vague alarm, they found a certain charm in thus adventuring upon the brink of the unknown, the fathomless perhaps, in their divergent heritage. Serene in sheer defenselessness they drifted now, unmindful of what lay beyond, the distance left behind or depths below.

Along the summits of the somber hills a ragged fringe of flame showed red against the pallid north. Nearer now there crept the leaping signal fires, to mark the climbing line of slow oncoming men. When Krystjan spoke again, it was as though he had returned with marks of

haste upon him from contact with his troops.

"Svanhild, the Eastern emphasis upon the feminine in the Godhead, and in the North upon the masculine, cancel each other. Concern yourself therewith no more. 'Tis easy for us all to see and scorn the folly and discrepancy in foreign faiths. But through long sojourn on far Eastern lands I came to comprehend some secrets of their lore. In exaltation of virginity the Moslem paradise must rank supreme, wherein transfigured houris reappear unsullied as the dawn of day, restored inviolate throughout eternity. For their own poets testify that each new love creates a new virginity, and sacred scriptures verify the mystery as well, and dwell with lavish imagery upon the vista of unclaimed delight, unravished maid innocence evoked afresh at each unfolding of the soul's advance. Even the dear disciple John, beloved of the Master in his youth, when late in life he came to tell his version of immortal truth was but another oriental poet, unable to convey his vision of the New Jerusalem, save in the image of a fair unravished bride, adorned for her husband.

"That courage in the Saracen, which I at first misjudged to be impatience for the clasp of some bright houri in the heroes' paradise, like to our own great forebears' haste to reach Valhalla, upborne by flashing Valkyrie, later I discerned as but the sense of life's continuance, the living soul's survival. In all campaigns I found, unfailingly, that those who loved life most and openly avowed their joy therein, were ever first to chance the final test and yield up gallantly the very prize they held so dear, while those most niggardly with joy, and irked and chafed by others' goodly cheer, were ever craven under siege, yet grudging of that very life they prized so ill. The verve and mettle of a soldier is but his thirst for immortality, urged on and heightened by the pace of war's unleashed heroic race for time and place. In like degree, they only who have breathed most deeply of life's joy desire the soul's survival, and do performe maintain in their own hearts a certainty that they can scarce

explain."

The undulating outline etched in flame was nearer now and clearer, compelling his attention, but lucidly he still pursued the tenor of their mutual concern. "This trust, this charge, this Anatole! If his retentive grasp be strong as now appears to us, how grave the matter of his tutoring and choice of what and where he studies, wherefore I am resolved to send him first to Angleland, 'tis better for a youth than Rome, and much of Rome has come to that best of islands over the Roman roads and waits him there. There seems to be in that mysterious isle a harmony maintaine 'twixt old and new. To each fresh voice they do give ear, yet never does it drown the old, and Anatole is thirsty for the old and overwhelmed, ala with so much new. To Oxford he should go and rest him in the past until he shall have caught his breath again. You'll find the faith of Anglelan there thoroughly entrenched, to wit, that leadership and fellowship which stamp the rising ruling class is made withal merely by mastering Latin and Greek, which same is grafted, years on end, upon the sapling native stock, recruited from oncoming youth. The lad can there await the call to go to Rome, and in the waiting the tenor of his mind may turn from holy orders."

"Holy orders! The holy order of his life is music, and never will he seek escape."

"Svanhild, do you not then revere the lad's religion?"

"Forsooth, I do. Music is his religion, and should he ever take the road to Rome, 'twill be because he seeks a cloak for solitude and surreptitious ecstasy, in full surrender to his talent. For all he asks is but a fragment out of time, a scrap of quietude and access to a space enclosed of leisure for intensive toil, a frame for silence, the which he may embroider with his own device of sound, in such color, threads and lustre as do convey his own delight. Angleland's as good as Rome for

this, and Oxford made to order. However, these parental cares, beloved king, will fall from us. His mother should, nay shall decide upon the school and his curriculum."

"His mother! How, beloved queen, might such a fair solution come to pass?"

"Concede it as a certainty. She herself shall welcome us and clasp the glowing lad, grown level to her eyes."

This time Krystjan's laughter rang out high and clear. "Svanhild, I know something that you do not know. Long have I surmised and know not for a certainty. One year without your crystal in our midst and lo, its potency is past, its usefulness outgrown, and never will it be replaced. You see better and deeper and farther without it. Come tell, are you not aware that what I say is true?"

Some vague hesitancy prompted her to parry with unwonted coquetry, then suddenly with utter candor came her answer seriously. "'Twere better for us both, these latter days in this new land where I was never known, that I should come into my own among the subjects of your realm without recourse to hidden lore, to seances or nuances beyond the pale of common ken, and let those few who knew me as a seer surmise that under deadly fright, true gifts of sight may disappear, and mine are locked within the crystal sphere, there beneath the sounding and the pounding of the deep.' Then quizzically, "Come, Krystjan, now confess to me why in this last prophecy you find such proof of my clairvoyance?"

"Because, since you divine my heart's desire, I shall confess I have prepared, in celebration of the peace upon our shores, a journey of good fellowship and faith, of earnests to our friends at court in Angleland, to earn a stable place in their esteem. Together we shall bask in their soft summer to learn their ways and watch their revelry. Their monarch's invitation, there to find and bind friendships to live after us, I did accept. That Anatole should find his mother there I had not dreamed."

"Then dream it now while yet you may, nor wait for time to verify my claim, which same cannot survive the felling stroke of proof and still remain a dream. Even now her heart has found its rest from all that weary quest of refuge for her son. Indeed, the prayer that her beloved one be granted grace to come to his full strength and stature on the earth and far survive her span of life, though magnified by her extremity, is but the same that all true mothers pray. Hers the same impassioned abnegation that nature with her wild inexorable will imposes on her valiant daughter which sentence cannot be gainsaid. Through tidal waves of generations advancing and receding, in tireless exaltation! Unbroken chain of sacrificial images, aflame to yield their sentience and their breath to quench the thirst for immortality of the next immaculate incarnation, and with a burning frenzy of surrender give place to those involuntary ones that, willy-nilly, follow after in the race."

Within the vivid, fervid face, transparent to her practiced eyes, his inarticulate thoughts took rise, as flying clouds in mounting wind.

"Since your return from Faeroe in the spring, your conscience suffers needlessly. The daylight world so fair to me, for you is overcast with portents of calamity. Your sanguine temper languishes and mourns as for the dead. For another's fruitless dolor, a mother's mortal dread, yourself are haunted by a specter of the future, the shadow of a shadow, without immediate significance and with no roots in circumstance! Not that ~~the~~ future ~~xxx~~ events ~~may~~ not sustain her premonitions, but their ~~xxxxxx~~ performance shall be postponed for many a day, and in the interval their sorry human prescience cast away, with vast unconscious relief. Hear patiently while I explain. Despite the clear transparent atmosphere of lofty altitudes, wherein the farthest view shows sharp and clear, mountain climbers yet may miss the way, in that they fail to gauge the distance of their goal and thus miscalculate the time required to make the journey thither. So on rare ascents of sheer clairvoyance,

although the vista glimpsed be sure and right, the seer by his very clarity of sight may underestimate the journey yet to go and falter at the stern, inordinate delay. By converse, though the mother's vision be true, its kind delay does hearten her."

"You speak familiarly of natural consequence and supernatural influence, yet with no trace of raillery or jest, as though conversant with imponderable authority."

"Even so, perchance, what then?"

"Svanhild, your thoughts are like the flying quarry, which following from afar I haply keep in view, till suddenly they veer, they swerve and disappear, and leave me breathless from the chase, halt and helpless, rendered blind and deaf, stricken with stupidity - in fine, dumfounded."

"Forego to understand. Forgive me that I do but weary you, when I, unwary one, would fain explain. This is a case for credence without comprehension, which practice should come naturally to one of your professed belief. Accept my certainty on faith, however void of proof; take but my word for once, before the reasons rise in ranks to justify my claim. Krystjan, I promise faithfully that when her pathway crosses ours, you'll seek in vain for traces of her sorrow, wherefore I do implore you to renounce the lavish pity in its secret flow, 'till southward in full summertime we sail, and for yourself you verify my words. The black foreboding of her star-crossed youth and sad maternity shall be effaced. Put by the recollection, kindly king, and royally with me rejoice that Anatole may know her yet in years of grace, and watch her bloom as ne'er before. For lo, the final earnest of relinquishment in yielding up her cherished son, in hope for him of fairer, freer, safer life than could be his with her at home, has wrought a miracle upon her sight, unclosing and beholding. Already shadows flee, and through the gladdening years more and more she'll come to live in the waiting world

of Anatole, in that new heaven and new earth that comes to light with each and every child at birth."

"Amen, so be it then!"

"But Krystjan, none shall e'er make clear to me that lads to mighty manhood grown must yet fare forth to combat, as though in haste to taste their doom! Forsooth, for what, Krystjan, for what? A most unprofitable prize, one pitiable shrine! An empty tomb, a long abandoned bier, a most unholy sepulcher, the most disputed resting place of one who scorned it as a prison dread, and swiftly did escape therefrom."

"Svanhild, to you the whole of our knight errantry must seem but vain effrontery, and every fresh crusade only another heinous children's crusade that so appalled Roxanne at first and caused her widowhood at last. In what contempt must you then hold humanity, unstable as the winds at play, devoid of precept, rule or reason, each man at any age a child."

"Ah Krystjan, were it even as you say, one single anodyne, if you would know, suffices me. 'Tis childhood's wordless rhapsody that most in life entices me. I honor children, Sire." Sudden laughter of her own cut short the sheer incaution of her confidence, whose clear directness took them both off guard. "That I should thus, all uncoerced, confess a creed so simple and so obvious! It is the child unconquerable in man, defenseless, guileless, vulnerable, yet ready ever in a trice for blandishments that do beguile his being to its very core and render him entranced, that gladdens me and saddens me, that I shall evermore adore. It is the prescribed devotions in vain repetition that I find empty of all meaning."

"Svanhild, you are not aware of the human need for the authority of

religion. Without some stated form of worship and prayerful ritual the priceless precepts had been lost long since."

"Krystjan, do you believe that?"

"I know it! Here with our own people it is the ceremonies and the sacraments that sanctify their lives. Save for the unifying celebration of the mass, the unction of the eucharist, the teachings in themselves would not survive, nor their power and influence remain. Yours is a mind free of symbols, like your father the gode's, but he has more experience and sympathy with the practice of religion."

"Yes, he thought highly of the service performed by the Irish priest at home, who gave unflagging support to his/herished goal of peace."

"To say nothing of the benign influence of my uncle Ghenalt, whose very glance of dazzling innocence absolved the penitent without recourse to the confessional."

"Indeed, indeed, Krystjan, I never shall forget that gaze that sanctified our marriage vows. In but a little time he shall be in our midst again."

"Thank you for the welcome warning of his coming."

And now they speak as lovers do, thoughts that float on spacious tides of life's expectancy, as a pair of outspread wings whose motion has till then upborne a bird that now planes slowly and majestically above the world below. Their words come softly, charged with hopes and fond indulgences, like phrases sung in unison only to themselves. Held by the magnetism of their true accord, attuned to pure identity of pitch, Svanhild's low tones and Krystjan's high ones sound literally the selfsame key.

"When in the glory of the sun returned once more the season pauses a high noon, we will journey southward o'er the Northern Sea, until the cliffs of Angleland loom clear in welcome to our argosy." Thus happy husbands of all times, upon the eve of hazards unforeseen, envisage future honeymoons. And thus oblivious of the paths by which they'd come, des-

cended from that last togetherness alone as two who fear no separation,
safe in a world within a dream, apparent only from within and therefore
hidden from all eyes and ears without.

When again her chamber door had closed on Svanhild, there alone she scarce was conscious of his leaving, nor he that she was left behind, as through the empty corridors he strode along. In all the quiet of that unlit vault of solid stone no eyes had seen him come, none saw him go but one. A stern and lonely specter loomed within the eerie glow from dying coals upon the ashen hearth, and raised a sharpened visage irked with long impatience. Then, as indeed he would have passed sans pause for recognition, "Not so fast, Krystjan, not so fast," and Ragna rose to stay his pace. "What an hour for leave-taking, or for that matter, for visiting your home like a thief in the night! And where was Svanhild these dark hours? Her room deserted, her bed untouched, and all the clothes she wore this day scattered about in disarray. I am exhausted with the search I made."

Contrite, the man drew the harassed woman down to rest beside him on the stone. "Ragnamor," he said, suppressing of necessity the buoyancy of his mood, "One whole month it is since I've been home or even heard from Svanhild. We merely talked upon the topmost rampart beneath the dome of heaven's privacy, as married people often must find secret solitudes to say things anyone might hear, so innocent they are, but which would never be said unless they were alone." He passed an arm around her irate shoulders.

"And what, pray, could be of such import to keep Svanhild from her rest so long? You've been away a month indeed; all here grow anxious for your safe return and guard with every care the hours that now remain that she have peace. And now you come as heedless as a yokel or some awkward thrall, untrained in courtly ways of life, a stranger to right and orderly behavior."

Krystjan sighed. "Believe me that I value much your deep concern for

Svanhild, but truly she took no harm. We merely talked together on and on and watched the darkening sea and shore, but when I come to tell the burden of our theme, the sound and sense to you will melt away, as dreams recounted in the light of day. It turned upon the point of choosing a school for Anatole in Angleland, where I must go upon such purposes as you already know, or should he take the road to Rome. Where does your selection lie?"

"Well now," said Ragna, intrigued at last, "How should I know that? But tell me of your choice."

"To us 'tis Angleland, where's the trend toward willing entry of all thanes into the ranks of government."

"The ideal is good and practical it seems in Iceland, and in Angleland too, perhaps, but here among your people, Krystjan, succession is the only right they recognize. Natural inheritance upholds their faith, an elemental faith that will not change in our lifetime or Anatole's."

"Hereditary sovereignty, beyond a doubt, in your esteem alone lays proper claim to loyalty."

"Loyalty were no excuse for turning from the highest in the homelands to seek a spouse. Yea Krystjan, rank itself, rank by royal inheritance is all our heady people venerate; for else why must a prince, to please them in his wooing, desert their blessed country to find a bride of equal rank whate'er the alien race or creed or rivalry of her own realm? Wherfore all's waste unless the stock thus chosen for ascendancy stand test of sure heredity."

New as was this arbitrary theory, he accepted it entire like a precocious pupil who can learn on the spot. Ragna watched the process with sound satisfaction. Then bending lower, level with her gaze, he spoke with searching gravity, "We have another need in our Norse inheritance, the tireless quest and zest for conflict, with clash of temperaments on issue

great and small, until wellnigh impossible to reach concessions that might bridge the breach. What kind of challenge or enlightenment can e'er recast the temper and the nature of men that revel in belligerence? What precept, promise, penance shall unite such clans as find the very zenith of their tribal life in prideful will to unremitting strife? Allegiance to some unquestioned authority, imposed by royal inheritance, alone can curb such lust for strife."

"Krystjan, this is a subject without end, but frankly, on a night like this I should have thought some other questions had engaged your tongues."

"As from Scottish or from Spanish pipes, whate'er the melody evoked, whene'er the blower stops for breath one lone persistent note remains, a sound that of itself resounds, so the trust of Anatole upon the care and conscience of us both, throughout the tenor of our dialogue claimed and reclaimed our truant thoughts."

"Krystjan, I should understand, and well I do, who more than I should know the ceaseless sound that pounds within the heart for any child committed to one's fostering. And Ghenalt ever heard the same. How clearly remember that he and I, when we were met, whate'er the questions we had planned to solve, one magnet in our hearts alone drew on our speech."

Evading now her kindling glance, he spoke with boyish earnestness. "If ever I accomplish aught of worth upon my own translations, which you agree does seem a goodly undertaking, 'twill be because of Anatole. His burning zeal and uncoerced persistence! The way he bends his back to strain with all his might for - "

"For what?"

"For grace and ease in all performance he essays, for the effortless result of an effort that has become ease."

"Well truly, Krystjan, on a night like this I should have thought, with Svanhild at your side, high above the world, some fairer hope of

lighter vein closer to your heart had lain."

"Though far removed from this our running duel, Ragnamor, I am reminded of a raucous jest that challenged me to answer then and there, amid the banter of the sultan's feast. The strength prodigious and the tirelessness of all my legionnaires was praised without reserve, until our host declared it was enough, whereon this same Sala'adin himself to me delivered his decree. 'Fair friend, most honored Christian chieftain and most eulogized, I trow you Norsemen work too hard. You weary others with your heavy toil. Your endless effort doth lack grace withal.' Which same derisive claim myself gainsaid, 'Most honored host, I must protest the basis of your levity, and lest in turn you think I jest, attend on me with gravity. If as a race we Norsemen do fall short of grace, the reason is not far to seek. It is that we have not yet worked enough, with ease of life postponed remorselessly, until our uttermost and best be done. It is the final test alone that yields us ease at last, and grace of rest.'"

"'Tis well you summon these far thoughts from foreign parts to serve you here at court, where life goes on apace and warnings all too soon are lost. It were poor thrift to hoard for gala use alone, treasures of the mind acquired at such a cost, whose worth you fared so far from home to find. Yet none-the-less, upon a night like this I should have thought these parental cares were premature for you and Svanhild, when in the natural order of events, with a son of your own, all too soon you'll share concern for his schooling. Postpone these vain responsibilities while yet you may."

"Ragna, you are right, I will postpone. But there is work for me does and you to do, for Svanhild warns me that even now Uncle Ghenalt prepares to visit us."

Availing himself of her pleasure at the news, he straightway took his leave.

XI

The day was far spent when Svanhild rose from rest to keep her tryst with the blithe young voyagers. Anticipating what fruitful cargo of impressions theirs should be, she sat where Ragna often found her, with folded hands upon her knee in placid receptivity. Woven entire from virgin wool, her seamless gown swept softly down, unbroken in its folds from rounded throat to where its heavy hem now dragged across the supple arches of her green-shod feet, vivid as the velvet moss upon the stones at the water's edge. Leisure flowed about her as the caressing current round an island in the fjord, as hither came the three together, Helma and Selma and Anatole, and with them the aura of the new and strange.

Here and now was greeting time. There was fervor of words and gestures, all talking at once, with Anatole no whit behind the rest. From the wonders he had seen, a stirring and a quickening had taken place. Finding so great a change in the lad, the others drew him on by question and comparisons, until he spoke upon the import of his earlier travels, as one who fain would make amends for long delay.

At first he dwelt upon the Faeroe Isles that harbored him. 'Twas plain that he had never found the refuge desolate, and now they learned the lad had loved the place. The tang of the air, the taste of salt, the sound of the sea had reached and touched deep notes within his being, while the circling flights and hurtling flocks of helpless innocents beguiled the child with tender blandishments. His eager nature naturally responded to the plaintive cry of lisping infancy in search of shelter on the barren rocks and reefs, and expanded in the warmth of his own sympathy. "If only more," he said, "who languish in the world might find their way to Faeroe. Wanderers, full weary of a land they know, might well explore the sounding grotto underneath the crypt, renew their strength with hard-

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ship and their faith with awe and wonderment. 'Tis worth a pilgrimage from anywhere to see the place, to peer into that sanctuary rare, and glimpse the glory of the prelate's face, and hear the ghostly echoes of the choir, the muffled tumult of the mass - - muttering, murmuring and dying down like the wind long after his voice has ceased. Nor can you see him say the words, so still he stands, and listens like the rest of us to the whispering sound so far and faint it might have come from out the catacombs in Rome. Before the reredos he looms erect as strong as Krystjan then, but when he walks among his flock he leans upon his staff, as though the shepherd's crook he bore upon his shoulders through the years now bears his slight but weary weight."

"Well child, you have given me a sense of his power and presence I have never had, although throughout our North his fame has long been justly known. Faeroe's haunts of mystery were ever resonant upon the tongues of mariners until this day. Of late the travellers teach us that a chambered edifice, a sort of secret sepulcher underlies the meager isles, and sailors' rumors reach us of a subterranean swell like the phantom roar of the surf in a shell. On every shore, the sea folks say, a fabled, fettered giantess immune to death sank slowly out of sight and still draws breath within the fluted labyrinth of her petrified cloak."

"So they say at Faeroe, but I found no songs to verify the history, nor written texts to verify the mystery."

"What, Anatole, no songs to verify?"

"Indeed, indeed. Frere Franchot ever bade me search for songs upon the way."

Svanhild knew that in his home the lad had chiefly loved the voices and the verses and the instruments of many troubadours of knightly fame, for Anatole had had as preceptor even one of these, and now she plied him for some reminiscence, some fragment of that innocent delight. The time was right, it seemed, for with no dalliance he essayed to conjure from

his memory a single melody.

"A gentle song," he said, "but not a simple one, for rather is it intricate, ornate, a sort of serenade that turns upon a Frankish phrase and follows through a single phase of nature's tireless industry."

Helma and Selma in concert, "What is the gentle song about?"

Then Svanhild, "Yes, Anatole, tell us first. What in all nature is the Frankish song about?"

"About worms."

"About worms?"

All laughed in concert. When he could, Anatole continued, "The song is about silk worms." The little maids stared like lovely dolls, but he ignored their ignorance. "It was written on a scroll of measured lines where subtle, sinuous designs were interwoven with the staff and stave that gave the text the final touch of artifice and poesy. It was Frere Franchot wrote it so and sent it to my mother when she was betrothed. It sings of the silk still borne by the worms, to be worn by the bride on her wedding day. True to the promise of the scroll, when the time for her marriage drew nigh, a roll of shimmering silk arrived, the which was fashione

Here his listeners centered so intently on his words that all effort went out of the recital, and he was borne along with easy assurance, "How beautiful the lustre was, what sumptuous material, the color of pale honey with shadows of clear amber and zigzags of lightning along its swaying folds."

"How was it fashioned? Can you tell?" asked the queen persuasively.

hanging therefrom a heavy golden cord draped up her skirt above the knee, so she might walk, else had it been too long, as were all other robes of State in France."

With this recital ended, he seemed for the time bereft of further words. Finally, in candor as did befit the case, the queen inquired, "How comes it that you know the gown so well? For surely, you were not among the wedding guests."

"I know it well from feast days and from anniversaries, and one whole day and late into the night she wore it, and I layed me down in the shining foam of its train and thought me of the song. And not so long ago it was."

"What day was that, Anatole?"

He paused to choose his words and spoke them with an even calm, "'Twas when we watched from out the chapel tower the other knights come riding home, with whom my father had gone forth to Rome, then onward to Jerusalem."

"Long is the day and slow its passing hours for those who move not from their watch. How late did your mother stand and wait?"

"I cannot tell. When light had gone I fell asleep. I only know next day she said, and still does say, 'Your father, Anatole, has not returned as yet, and in his absence you must learn to fill his place.'"

"Was that the last time the silken dress was worn?"

"The last indeed that ever was or evermore shall be. Its cherished form and floating folds do not exist, because thereafter the finely fitted fabric was undone, first severed in its seams, the fragments rearranged and smoothed upon a frame, and when restored fashioned into three pennants at whose center in threads of gold a Roman cross was embossed. There beneath the sun upon the chapel tower the banners float, in solemn memory of the noble knights that have not returned from our last crusade."

"Now tell me of your teacher, Anatole. Did he as well depart for

Rome?"

"He did indeed, and there remained. He did become a Benedictine monk and was ordained the very year my mother married. The little song he wrote for her, his last composed, in what is termed with us at home 'The Gay Science.'"

The listening eyes of Svanhild now rested openly upon him.

"And so your singer's voice was silenced for the world by the marriage of your mother?"

"No, it was not just that way, for always had he longed to enter the church, but as his calling grieved her so, even in their childhood, he waited through her girlhood years until her marriage should take place, his sumptuous marriage, which same he did attend before he took his vows of poverty."

"Vows of poverty?"

"But yes. For he gave up his mighty fief, his ancient name, and most of all, his high and prideful place of power in France."

"For what? And to what end?"

Anatole thinking, "Well, you see, he wanted to consecrate his music to God, and have no other care but that."

"You mean," said the queen, "he wanted to consecrate himself to his music, and have no other care but that?"

"Yes," said Anatole, as if perceiving it for the first time. "Yes, and soon he was revered, indeed, in his own calling, composing music for the Mass. From many lands aspiring students did journey to Rome to study under him. But when he learned that my father was lost in the crusade, he returned to guide and counsel us and thenceforth was my tutor until we arrived at the bishop's school on the Faeroes, where he did direct the music of the monastery."

Silence fell upon them as a pall of separateness and patience descended upon him, a burden Svanhild deemed too heavy to be borne for long

by any youth. Musingly she spcke, "This faith your mother bears oppresse me. Salvation comes at such a cost, too slight the gain, too much is los and every hymn and prayerful lay that you deem sacred, far too sad to sin in youth's heyday, when life and laughter interplay. At best they offer balm for wounds we know not of, nor care to learn, even from a song, and childhood here is fair and long."

"Have you not heard, beloved queen, of good king Ethelbert's conver-sion long ago in Angleland? A princess from our Christian court became his queen and dwelt there on that pagan isle, with naught but music to uphold her faith. And once, when Ethelbert before the altar of his heathen gods did hear the distant chanting of her Christian choir, so moved was he by strains of that immortal hymn that then and there he did embrace our creed. The song sublime that surely men will ever sing gave Angleland her first Christian king."

"Alas, I never heard the tale 'till now. But tell me, child of faith and fantasy, if there were a song held sacred in your faith, which hearin I should straight become a Christian, how then? What think you, Anatole, what would you?"

His face grew gravely wise, and quietly he said, "I would not sing it. The song I have to sing is but a treasured lay inspired by nature's thrift, with one sincere refrain throughout repeated to sustain the burde of the theme."

The maidens stared like lovely dolls, neither understanding nor questioning. From all his eager testimony scant meaning they derived. Holy poverty, give all for God, consecrate one's music to the Church, or one's life to music, hear a song and turn a Christian, or hear it not and stay the same!

Anatole abandoned hope of their following him with a twinge of sadness, like a sharp foretaste of farewell, adjusted his lute, tested its tune, and essayed the song itself:

The linear silk by the worm still worn,
Its gossamer splendor in frenzy born,
When all of the shimmering shrouds are shorn
One burgeoning reticence shall adorn -

Laissez-faire - laissez-faire.

Each sinuous, tenuous, single line
With duplicate filaments furled so fine
Festoons the cocoons until trenchant, warm,
A chrysalis waits for your sentient form -

Laissez-faire - laissez-faire.

For pearls under water or gold in fire,
Whatever the treasure your dreams require,
Shall fashion the shoon of your heart's desire
To carry the perilous freight entire -

Laissez-faire - laissez-faire.

Ethereal pall over breast and wrist,
As sheer as the fall of some ghostly mist.
Ah, many a millwheel a-grinding grist
Must furnish the feast for your nuptial tryst -

Laissez-faire - laissez-faire.

The close-drawn trio listened raptly 'till the singing ceased, then Svanhild bade the lad render it again. When at last he stilled the strings, the little maids no longer stared with vacant looks, but glowed with bright expectancy, for all the world the blushing brides they soon must surely be. But the wedded one still listened inwardly and murmured absently, "The words in themselves convey the meaning." Then openly, "Is this not then a sacred song? The silkworms are verily to me a miracle of nature, even as the elves of light that conjure forth the dazzling fantasies of frost to daze and blind us. There is a song from my childhood, I should dearly love to hear you sing."

They clustered close, following her lips as she pronounced the phrases, swaying gently to the rocking cadence and childlike interval. At first her voice, softly resonant, dark and brilliant, thrilled him so strangely that he could follow neither the words nor the air, but gradually, what with cautious fingering and muted chords, he finally had the lilt of it and they were fairly launched. The children sang with gathering zest, the strings rang out with rising brilliance, and a blending came with their growing assurance.

ALFHEIM
 (The Abode of the Light Elves.)

Weaving with the frost,
 Retrieving labors lost,
 Silently we breathe our rhyme.
 Cleaving through the dust,
 Heaving out the rust,
 Shining garlands wreath our clime.
 Salamanders in the fire and mermaids of the sea,
 Gnomes of earth and sylphs of air
 Our ghostly footprints flee.
 Flaunting flint and flail,
 Vaunting suits of mail,
 Frozen echoes ring their chime.

Finding cloven shells,
 Rebinding broken spells,
 Secretly we hoard our rime.
 Winding spirals frail,
 Minding signals pale,
 Stealthily we forge our climb.
 Phantoms of the flying foam and goblins o'er the lea,
 Trolls and demons of the mountains
 Dread our alchemy.
 Turning frozen floss,
 Burning out the dross,
 Breathlessly we bide our time.

The slender song set close and tight; the crowded rune in the narrow tune now drew the several voices into one, when a sudden chill ran through the atmosphere, with a tingle of frost followed by a rising wind, precursor of a mounting storm. The blithe quartet sought shelter within the fortress, where waited Ragna filled with apprehension. In uncontrolled alarm she challenged Svanhild, "If Ghenalt is upon the sea in such a storm, how perilous will his landing be! And Krystjan has not yet returned; what a time to absent himself! I must find a rescue crew to watch and salvage, if what you say of Ghenalt's coming is true."

The children were appalled, but worst of all, Svanhild was no longer her majestic self, but looked for all the world like a little girl, helpless and frightened, with no more authority than Helma and Selma, as the three retreated along the upper balcony.

XII

With his last keen backward glance at the queen and her consolers, Anatole turned to stalk the disappearing Ragna. Denied the role of consoler, he turned avenger. With the uncanny affinity of childhood for the gruesome and profane in any language, he did not lack for epithets. Indeed, Anatole could curse in many tongues, but sad to say, this now did not suffice. For a moment he trembled with the chill of nameless fear, and at the next he burned with the fever of shameless rage. Svanhild had not foretold the storm, only the coming of Ghenalt, nor could she help her clairvoyance.

From the first, he had dreaded encounter with Ragna, not for what she might do, but for what he, Anatole, might do if sufficiently incensed. More and more he loathed all circumstance in which he might become involuntary, and believed that such mischance should be avoided at all cost.

But with Ragna's final disappearance his fury was spent, and he collapsed on the great bearskin in the glow of the dying fire. An ominous breath swept the deserted hall, and under the gallery gloom gathered swiftly, as heralds of the oncoming storm.

He fell to musing in that half-world between sleeping and waking, into which images rush with the involuntary swiftness of nature filling a vacuum.

Her room. Once when he was supposed to fetch and carry hanks of wool and hemp for Helma and Selma, he made his errand past the familiar halls and on to the queen's portal, which stood wide open for anyone to enter. Anatole did not enter, but stood long upon the threshold, gazing upon the emptiness, wondering at the bleak austerity, at the absence of all human invitation. Never had he seen a place so barren,

so incredibly lonely; not a vestige of softness, sympathy or grace, not a touch of tenderness or cheer, or breath of floral fragrance; and stranger than all else, no sign of living thought, no evidence anywhere of the soul's aspiration or the heart's sore need of prayer - a retreat without a sanctuary.

He thought of his mother's sleeping chamber at home with the alcove where hung the purple silk in sweeping folds above the stately couch, with damask counterpane and cushions heavily embossed, where always lay a treasured volume with her rosary to mark the passage last perused. And at the farther end that other alcove, where the light burned always and flowers shed their freshness. Where, whenever he passed, even though he did not kneel upon the steps that rose to the altar, a quiet humility overcame him and he knew himself to be but a helpless child, yet safe in the care of some infallible power that watched and ever held him dear. Even as he remembered, a certain grace descended upon him and he forgot his own exile and pitied the weary Svanhild, homesick and alien like himself there in her yawning cavern of a room. To be sure, there was space, majestic and free, for far and wide through the casement shone the open sky and the open sea, and the walls within were crude and bare, stark and stern and stone cold. In the center of the lofty room he dimly now remembered a bed like a boat impaled upon a reef, its bold high prow soaring far above him, the downy coverlet unrolled and lying in a swirl like a collapsed sail. For all the world it might have been some long-abandoned barque minus mast and master, oars and anchor, cast by the waves into some natural cavern in the cliff where none came and went, only salt spray flying and the sad wind sighing and the seagulls crying.

He got up stiffly, sped across the flagstones and up the steps that led to the long low gallery against the western wall. Toward the far end stood the portal of her chamber, now fast barred and locked in silence.

There upon the unyielding threshold he laid him down to wait sans comfort of cushion or coverlet, cradling his unresponsive lute. As many a child has found consolation in consoling, imparting its own living warmth to some lifeless object, a helpless doll or imaginary pet, perhaps, inanimate but cherished as a symbol of its own dire need, here at last he found oblivion.

XIII

Soft gray dawn was melting over land and sea. Gray gulls floated on the smoothly running waters of the fjord or drowsed in clusters on the gray rocks. A faint rose brightened in the tender sky and lay in reticent diffusion over the unawakened world. The air was windless with the day's new bloom as yet untouched. With her nurseling, man, asleep, nature was free to preen and sun herself and dream her enigmatic dream, unmolested by his insatiable demands.

In such a sense of undivided privacy, out of the forest afoot, alone and stealthily came Krystjan, breathing in the hush of rain-washed morning peace, now flush with earth's beatitude. None stopped him at the gate nor heard him cross the courtyard, but in the door flung wide he paused as though the inner gloom repelled him, then crossing swiftly to the hearth where last he sat, dropped down beside a figure there. "Don't tell me, Ragna, you have been here since I left, waiting but to upbraid me further and more roundly for that I ran away?" His confident beginning, however, found no favor. Ragna was in grief, and in her long and arduous life no art of shriving had she yet acquired. Here in the North the white magic of confessional was still unknown and unavailable, and for natures of such stiff unyielding stuff as hers no recourse offered save that blackest of all black magic, practised far and wide, the turning of pain into spite, transforming grief into a weapon, remorse into a missile with a deadly aim. Heedless and headlong she began, "What manner of man is he that leaves his wife on such a night undefended from the tempest's might? She was affrighted by the storm and now must rest, and no one shall awake her, least of all yourself. Think not by coming now that you will find admittance. What a time to leave and what a time to come! Krystjan, nothing can account for your delinquency. My patience is exhausted."

Guileless and sanguine, he did not flinch before her tirade, but threw himself into the first breach to make amends. "What wild alarms are these? The storm, at last, is past, but our encampment was a deluge, our shelters overthrown, our fires submerged, and torches drowned in darkness. Across our pathway fallen timbers lay, whole trees uprooted with their branches caught like giant antlers interlocked. We must make shift as best we might to shelter drenched and shivering troops. And when at last the tumult of the torrent ceased and over all a blessed peace did fall, I made my way alone. How quiet are the halls within, now that the storm has passed. Should not our harassed mood depart, and you as well find rest?"

With both his heavy hands upon her restless ones, which otherwise had veiled her face, he watched two bright tears distilled from pain course slowly down her cheeks, and knew her anger was over.. She waited, mute and blinded by the unaccustomed brine, and felt his youth draw close to her. Once again, as when a lad, his being made its oft repeated, purposeful appeal. She sat transfixed beside him, as though in proximity to some elemental force in nature, some primitive virtue thus far unclaimed by life's necessity, reliving what now she saw had been the glory of her own estate, a portion priceless in her prime, vouchsafed to her alone. Her consternation fell away, and as of yore she caught her deep and vigorous breath, and thereupon remembered suddenly fresh garnered care for him to share. "Of course you know I have not waited here throughout two long unrestful nights to censure you. Who else was here to welcome your storm weary guests arrived in such inclemency?"

"Ghenalt, my uncle, in such a pass? But he has ever sailed the sea by storm. He trusts the elements to yield God's speed for him, and safe lands whate'er his destination. Deep be his rest from perils past, here on his native shore at last. I sadly grieve your night was broken thus."

From Ragna's face to Krystjan's searching gaze a mind looked forth

unknown to him. For the first time in his life he saw her as she was before his time, not the Ragnamor he knew, the guide and guardian, nurse and mother, but another, someone young, untried and vulnerable, with no grip upon her fate, no foothold in affairs of state. He wondered what her words would be should she speak now from out this changeling self. But all enfolding thought confined her in some former scene wherein she did enact a pantomime he might but watch, not rightly comprehend.

She herself now stood with toil-strong hands at rest upon her breast as though in breathless waiting for sign of life returning, at the foot of the pallet in Krystjan's room where they had laid the weary saint. The prostrate form so stark and still and straight, bathed and decked in raiment soft as queenly women wear at night and fill the deathly whiteness with their living warmth, insensate there in Krystjan's fine white shift upon the snowy smoothness of the linen sheets with phosphorescent shine on brow and beard and folded hands! She gazed with tear-deep eyes and a tremor shook her as the ghost of passion from the vanished years revived as pure regenerate compassion. Krystjan saw the gaze and felt the tremor and offered timid aid as though in deference to a stranger. She took his proffered arm and leaned thereon, a mute and cryptic sufferer, not Ragna but another.

Again as then, in blinding pity did her eyes behold each stark and empty fold that wrapped as in a shroud the fallen giant, and search the silent faces bowed above his bed. Who were these tall attendants here that hung upon her word and did as they were bid, these docile ministers so ruddy in the torch's light, who looked to her for impetus? What had she herself to do with them, bereft of all imperative by such sad posture of events? And what had they to do with him, the wanderer, the wearied one, whom none of them had ever known? Not even one had yet been born when he went forth upon his ministry. From some almighty spring within her breast, beneath her helpless hands, surged a tide of living prayer that

breathed the breath of life upon the chilling air, filling the room with her upsoaring will, unwasted strength and power of soul, and emptying it of all else. Whate'er the weariness entailed, he, Ghenalt, now was home at last, no more to roam the wintry seas. The years of long delay dissolved, the past closed over as wounds that recover, the future rose where once the path broke off.

Willy-nilly, Krystjan sensed depths and breadths beyond his ken, of thought and feeling tangent to his own that far outran the gamut of his natural span. Estranged from themselves and each other, though they had ever been as kin, the two resumed with mutual reticence their old familiarity.

"It is for you and Svanhild now to learn and sing together what he and I learned long ago in youth from the great skald of our day, taught only to the chosen few, in whom betrothal stands immortal."

Then in a deep and throbbing voice the king had never heard, the phrases followed evenly:

I kept my thirst to drink with you

Your health, my dear, your health.

I saved my life to spend with you

In wealth, my dear, in wealth.

I pledged my troth to fast with you

By stealth, my dear, far at night.

I stilled my fears to pray with you

For strength, my dear, for strength.

I stayed my tears to weep with you

At length, my dear, at length.

I held my breath to watch with you

in death.

"But there, this is no hour for teaching songs of plighted troth or

preaching faith's avowal. The hour of deliverance now draws near the queen, and in your absence the violence that wrecked your bridal barque might overtake her mood again with dire alarm. An ominous shadow cast a pall over the long night watch I kept alone before your birth, with Ghenalt long since gone. With dawn the crash of joy and grief, a sovereign life unfurled, a guileless life surrendered that set the course for me until this very hour."

"How great was my good fortune then."

"And never did Ghenalt question his calling."

"Nor you yours, Ragnamor, nor you yours. My gratitude is infinite. But I'll not believe that Svanhild has taken harm from the passing storm. A child of nature, she has no awareness of dynastic peril, and but slight regard for heirs of State. To her, the office of the gode holds greater import."

Suddenly, along the gallery upon the western wall a flying figure sped, as though hurled by a catapult. Miraculously sustaining his balance he plunged along unmindful of his stride that took unnumbered downward steps with the zest and grace of one who proudly waits upon the gods. As Mercury descending from Olympus, he bore himself with the full assurance that he also was a god. The adventthus of Anatole engendered vague uneasiness in Ragna, and Krystjan too, but both repressed their momentary trepidation, waiting on his words.

"As though transported by the storm, the queen's unfettered sight hath seen a barque belabored by the blast, in peril tossed with riven masts by a sudden seizure right itself and safely come to land. She fain would have you summon all the court into the chapel this very day at vesper time to celebrate with praise and thanksgiving the safe landing of the bishop."

Relieved, his hearers gave full acquiescence to the plan, and the eager messenger retraced his bounding steps.

"We were not grateful enough for the blessing of your rescue from the storm that wrecked your bridal barque, did not sufficiently rejoice to expurgate the dire effect of mortal fear we all had shared. This time we'll make amends in full. I've much to do; the autumn chill has come to stay. The Northern Light should shine tonight, and from the hearth the winter's answering fire shall soar once more."

XIV

At vesper time the court assembled in the chapel hall, with heartfelt gratitude for the safe arrival of their bishop. Krystjan entered first, with Ragna on his arm. Above the chancel rail came Anatole, his foreign face now darkly flushed above his narrow crimson gown and flaring surplice, wreathed about with fragrant incense. Beside him walked Ghenalt, restored by rest and care, resplendent in his bishop's vestments and towering mitred crown. Then softly and demurely, two willowy maidens moving as one shape crossed the threshold with uncertain grace, and slow-paced the distance of the central aisle: Helma and Selma, side by side, trailing gowns of unaccustomed length with cautious, even tread, one the blue of the fjord, one the green of the forest, while poised upon each slender stem of neck two headdresses did rise, and from their pointed tips two veils did float away, as snowy clouds caught fluttering upon the twin spires of the new stave church. The unfamiliar dignity, conferred by formal garb, by no means did account for such a metamorphosis of mien, such sudden change of face! Four flaxen braids in perfect symmetry fell down behind, four youthful arms outstretched before upbore two veiled offerings.

The acolyte advanced till meeting them half way, as though to intercept their steps with utterance unspoken; then by some secret acquiescence of the three he turned again, and with a glance of masterful restraint directed first at Krystjan, then at Ragna, then Ghenalt last and longest the while he swung his censer, to and fro, to and fro, preceded the doll-like pair as they approached on trembling feet.

The bishop from the chancel steps spoke to the quiet throng, "A messenger has reached me from the queen, craving indulgence for her non-attendance at the christening I shall here and now perform, of two new-born babes, Ranghena first, then Evelaine." Ragna sank upon her knees, Kryst-

jan bowed his head in disbelief. Exalted by foreknowledge of the present festival, Anatole gloried in the guilelessness of these imposing principals. Indeed, the alchemy of earth and conjury of nature, clandestine always, had triumphed yet again, wherefore the undisguised astonishment on both august faces was meat and drink to him. Here now were strangers come, more strange than he, younger, later ones, more helpless far, to shelter from inclemency. For them his tender years should be a living shield against the harshness of this clime! He was at home at last and knew his native strength once more. Here should be his loyalty, his future of idolatry. He would give a new meaning to chivalry, unique in northern latitudes, unrivalled in all christendom. But there was no one to observe the child's intensity, his burning zeal or cold resolve. For weal or woe henceforth the covenant of his allegiance persisted without witnesses. The rapt suspense that filled the hall was not for him, but centered upon the presentation pair.

With untried confidence the handmaids of the queen now knelt upon the shallow rise below the chancel rail, and Anatole with ceremonious care unveiled before the king his first-born offspring, softly slumbering. In Helma's blue embrace, in swaddling clothes of shining fleece, a sleeping seraph, haloed with a mist of gold, at peace upon the brink of life. In Selma's clasp the king beheld a sister shape, identical in mold, but crowned with locks of lustrous black.

The king seemed powerless to rise, and felt his heavy pulses lag, his natural paternal pride was sore delayed, with Regna's gaze recalcitrant, no better in receptivity. Between the twain the bishop bent his weighted head, with arms outstretched, no whit dismayed. Thereupon did Anatole, now flushed, now pale, ignore his wildly beating heart, and with his expert feline grace uplift each tender form and sense its warmth and gauge the slightness of its weight, then to the bishop's cradling arm reluctantly consign his precious freight.

The kindly sage engaged in gently swaying motion, as slender trees give easily upon their roots. The ageless adoration of the wise for human life's renewing upheld his eager consecration. For to his jubilant beholding here clearly were vouchsafed to him two soul-buds wrapped in innocence, unshadowed by experience, derived direct from first causation, no hint or haunting trace in either upturned face of some inheritance outlived, confused, unsure and fugitive forever, as faint intangible regret too distant to remember, and yet impossible to forget.

And just so often had his own resolve put on the prayerful strength that priests and mothers rightly know, that one more helpless child, by means of grace unutterable, be reconciled to life on earth, healed from the violence of birth!

Then there were those others, those intrepid ones, whose fierce undaunted will to live surmounts all hazards, odds and barriers, to snatch and catch at any chance, and thereto thenceforth without ceasing cling for dear life - for dear life. How far the tryst? How long the stubborn quest? What depth of human tenderness from what fond breast must needs invite the soul of one who comes as conqueror instead of guest? But here what unawakened bloom with naught to heal! No vestige lingered of the fateful script, the grim calligraphy not made with hands! Twin lifemasks struck from one immaculate mold, alike in utter confidence and outer cast of countenance, in each the chaste identity of simultaneous incarnation. To Ghenalt's long unclouded sight, two seraphs bright becalmed in flight, unweaned from youth's eternal spring they slept the sleep of peace on earth.

As for the king, for once in his believing life, Krystjan was incredulous. The floor gave way beneath him, and the solid walls receded from his soul's unreadiness. A mighty pity swelled within his breast, as though he gazed on sacrifice incarnate in the new fledged sensibility. His stout heart quailed before the helplessness of these unquestioning ones. By what unreckonin-

authority had he commanded their appearance upon the threshold of the world? There lay in utter trustfulness two fair defenceless beings, who but for him had ne'er been summoned to the courts of life, who for his sake, unknowing and unquestioning, here and now took on the gamut of earth's joy and pain! He marveled at the mute acceptance in each flawless countenance. What power had he to guarantee the safety of their souls? Had he himself not known the grief of anguished loss and bereavement that he had believed to be a cross unbearable? Recourse to the divine alone remained, and well for him that he retained his native gift of prayer. He had great faith in the power of the christening to guard and sanctify. He took comfort in the ceremony itself, and the benign influence of holy baptism on all his realm.

Now what swift reversal in his blood took place. Whence came this rising exultation, this mounting pride and surging tide of joy? Was it not the long unbroken years of love from ~~Evelyn~~^{Evelaine} to Svanhild that culminated here for all to see in this undreamed paternity? And what of Svanhild now, and her unfailing receptivity and power to harmonize and unify?

A newly gathered throng, eagerly dedicated to the bright unknown, the fresh imperative, the dormant future emerging as an undiscovered land of song and story, first told to tender youthful listeners, then faithfully transcribed as record for succeeding generations, and finally transformed into a literature unique in the North, yet based on native innocence unlike the sagas of the past, preserved as sheer indulgence, appealing even ^{the} as Arabian Nights to imagination untempered by experience, and utterly scorned by the skalds in their heroic memories. XXXXXXXXXKXXXXXKXXXXX
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But what might Svanhild's invocation be? What paean of felicity must float upon her quiet breath? Krystjan knew her wordless theme by heart, although its changelessness was ever new to him, and of a sudden certain he sensed the secret of her imagery, how he himself and all the silent

scene were clearly now observed by her, and as with her own listening eyes, himself did scan the goodly clan foregathered there.

Nearest him his lifelong sponsors: Uncle Ghenalt, ethereal and fair and Ragnamor still strong and hale, true guardians of his sovereignty, a next beyond them, towering over both, the proud unhearing skald, with youthful, truthful eyes, and countenance that shone as Baldur's very own.

The king no longer stood alone, he saw his very heart of hope in a the living, loving throng that gazed upon the twain newborn. It was enough. The need for supplication cancelled, he gave over his quest for the unction of prayer.

For ever at the summons of nativity - in castle, stable, hovel - like each man drops his own world where he stands, and straightway hastens to embrace the universe of fresh creation, heedless of his creed or station.

"I hold a newborn world in my arms,
Tread softly, ye who wish me well."

Once more the song of Evelaine recalled him to that earlier realm where his waiting soul was fed before the voice of Svanhild filled the reaches of his waking world, and as of yore a spell from far beyond the present fell upon his open heart and mind.

With one accord the congregation knelt, and in his fervent, fluent voice, far finer than the skald's, the bishop with a child in either arm began the slow baptismal chant, still strangely thrilling in this newly christened land.

E P I L O G U E .

When the service was over, as an incredible but indelible dream, life no longer seemed the same. A hush prevailed throughout the court, cast by the spell of infants sleeping. Outside the sanctuary of the newborn, Helma and Selma and Anatole, hand in hand, waited, listening to the silence, awed by the mystery of life's pristine renewal. Twin rosebuds tightly furled there in a royal bed, with all the time in the world to open in full majesty.

The first faint twilight gathered in the empty halls, where now the lonely skald wandered without goal or purpose. Deaf to all but the sound of his own voice, he sang softly to himself an oft repeated rune:

Whence time arose - what record shows,
Wherefor its haste, or why it slows,
Draws on apace, disdains repose,
Desireless grows, yet tireless flows.

How far the goal no signs disclose;
Refrains unroll, naught can transpose;
Unhindered as the wind that blows,
The place whereof - who knows, who knows.

What time bestows let none oppose,
Endowed with grace for wanton woes
That crowd the race with random throes,
Then breathless grows, yet deathless flows.

How far the goal no signs disclose;
Refrains unroll, naught can transpose;
Unhindered as the wind that blows;
The place whereof - who knows, who knows?